

## FINDING OUR WAY

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

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### Making Art Pay in San Antonio

Next week, the City's Cultural Affairs Office will host a wingding, "Finding Ways: A Conference on Art, Culture, and Economic Development in San Antonio." Expect it to be a confluence of urban hipsters, political heavy-hitters, and erudite arts patrons. Sounds like First Friday, but without the booze. Too bad about the booze.

This is not to say that the conference is a bad idea. The community should discuss its vision of the arts in San Antonio, how to fund, market, and sustain it. But before anyone can broach the topic of funding, there needs to be an institutional shift in the way the city values and views art.

First, art must be viewed as a public good, like parks, the library, and transportation (though let's hope it's more functional than VIA's bus service). Art should not be considered an extra amenity that San Antonio can take or leave; visual art, theater, music, books are an essential part of living a full, examined life. The value of the library and green space to a community can't be quantified, but we know that without them, the quality of life in San Antonio would be greatly diminished.

As with any public good, the *public* must be able to benefit from it, not only the moneyed elite or downtown dwellers. And just as parks and libraries are sprinkled throughout the city, so should art break the confines of Loop 410. If people don't want to leave their Hollywood Park enclaves or Von Ormy farms to visit a downtown art gallery, then take the art to them: in their community centers, schools, or malls (much like Centro Cultural Aztlan has done at Las Palmas). Vincent Valdez' work puts to shame the Thomas Kinkadee McGallery, but you wouldn't necessarily know it by living at Summer Glen.

Once the City has hooked residents in their own 'hood, let them know there's more art where that came from, just follow the trail of breadcrumbs along Highway 281 or I-35 or I-10.

With the City busy fostering art appreciation in the farther-flung areas of San Antonio, it won't have time to worry its little head about whether the tourists will flock to Blue Star. While there is a small group of art aficionados who travel the state to see Fort Worth's new art palace or to visit Houston, which is showing works by modern masters, tourists in general want to buy "Don't Mess With Texas" T-shirts and visit the Plaza Wax Museum.

However, the Convention and Visitors Bureau appears to have missed this trend, instead evaluating the validity of art by the comparing attendance at the Gallista Gallery or the International Accordion Festival to the number of out-of-towners who stop by Ripley's Believe It Or Not! or sing drunken karaoke at Fat Tuesday.

The CVB, which has demonstrated it cannot be trusted as one of the city's tastemakers, pays for cheap thrills — well, they're not so cheap — such as the Dallas Cowboys training camp and the Miss U.S.A. pageant, diverting precious resources that could be funneled to the arts community.

With the dearth of arts education funding in public schools, the City should serve as a liaison between the arts community and the school districts, bringing in painters and sculptors, musicians and writers, playwrights and actors. Instead of building yet another high school football stadium, what if school districts put that money into nurturing the artist — and not just the athlete — in each of its students?

Art appreciation doesn't require a password or a secret handshake. If city leaders are to build a creative community, it will require them to treat the arts as an integral part of living.

*"Finding Ways: A Conference on Art, Culture, and Economic Development in San Antonio" will be held Wednesday, November 12, from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. in the Mission Room of the Henry B. González Convention Center, Alamo and Market streets. Admission is free. •*

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